

Questions and Answers Regarding Two Petitions to Delist the Island Night Lizard

What is the Island night lizard?

A member of Genus *Xantusia*, the island night lizard (*Xantusia riversiana*) is restricted (endemic) to three of the Channel Islands – San Clemente, San Nicolas and Santa Barbara – off the coast of southern California.

While most lizards in the genus *Xantusia* measure between 1.6 inches (in) and 2.3(in) long from snout to vent, the Island night lizard is generally between 2.5(in) and 4.2(in) long, making it the largest member of its genus (Maisano, 2003).

The Island night lizard has variable coloring ranging from pale ash gray and beige, shades of brown, and varying amounts of black appearing in uniform, mottled, or striped patterns.

Island night lizards are extremely secretive and spend most of their time hidden from view under rocks, logs, and in thick, low-lying vegetation. This lizard eats a variety of foods including insects, spiders, centipedes as well as flowers and seeds (Stebbins 1985, Fellers and Drost 1991).

Unlike some other species of lizards which lay eggs, the Island night lizard produces live young. The number of young born to female Island night lizards appears to differ between each of the island populations - female lizards on San Nicolas Island average 5.3 young per brood while lizards on San Clemente and Santa Barbara islands averaged 3.9 young per brood (Goldberg and Bezy 1974, Fellers and Drost 1991, Mautz, 1993).

Why was the Island night lizard listed under the Endangered Species Act?

In 1977, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) listed the Island night lizard as a threatened species based on threats resulting from the introduction of non-native species to the Channel Islands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1977).

The introduction of goats, pigs and feral cats on San Clemente Island, rabbits on Santa Barbara Island, and other non-native species on all three of the

islands resulted in the loss of vegetation used by the lizard.

What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposing to take regarding the Island night lizard?

Currently, the Service is conducting a 12-month review. This action is being taken in response to one of two petitions submitted to the Service requesting the delisting of at least two populations of the Island night lizard.

In 1997, the Service was petitioned by the National Wilderness Institute to delist the Island night lizard. The petition asserted that the listing of the species was based on data error.

The National Wilderness Institute's petition requests the delisting of the Island night lizard as a species on all three of the Channel Islands it inhabits. After reviewing the information provided to us in the petition, we determined the petition is not substantial.

A second delisting petition was submitted to us in 2004 by the U.S. Navy. This petition asserts that the San Clemente, San Nicolas and Santa Barbara island populations of the lizard qualify as distinct population segments because they are discrete and each is significant to the species as a whole. Specifically, the U.S. Navy's petition requests delisting of the San Clemente and San Nicolas island populations, but does not request delisting of the Santa Barbara Island population.

We determined the U.S. Navy's petition and the information provided to us in that petition present substantial information and that further consideration of the requested is warranted.

Why is the Service conducting both a 12-month review and a 5-year review of the species?

After the Service determines that a petition provides substantial information indicating the requested action may be warranted, we are required by the

ESA to conduct a more comprehensive review of the species' status within 12 months.

The ESA also requires the Service to review the status of listed species at least once every five years. While we have continued to use the best available information to carry out our responsibilities for the Island night lizard, the information has not been fully evaluated under the ESA's 5-year review requirement. In July 2005, the Service initiated a 5-year review of the Island night lizard.

The 12-month and 5 year reviews will specifically assess a variety of issues, including: whether new information suggests the species' population is increasing, declining or stable; existing threats are increasing, stable, reduced or eliminated; there are any new threats; whether new information or analysis calls into question any of the conclusions in the original listing determination; and whether the species on each of the three islands qualify as distinct population segments.

What could the Service decide to do after completing the 12-month and 5-year reviews?

Based on the status review, the Service will make one of several possible determinations.

Depending on whether the species qualifies for recognition as a distinct population segment, one of four possible outcomes could result: (1) delisting for the species as a whole or one or more of the distinct population segments is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken; (2) removal from ESA protection is warranted for the species or one or more of the distinct population segments and a proposed rule to delist the species or populations is published. A final rule would be completed (generally within 12 months) after receiving public input and conducting peer review of the proposal; (3) the species as a whole or one or more of the population segments should actually be listed as endangered instead of threatened and the Service would publish a proposal to reclassify the status; or (4) delisting or reclassifying to endangered status is warranted but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the proposal is deferred while the Service works on other, higher-priority actions.

How can I comment on the status review or submit information that may be helpful to the Service?

The Service is actively seeking information from the scientific community, land management agencies, the public and other parties with knowledge of the species.

Information on the Island night lizard review should be submitted by close of business on October 23, 2006. Please send written comments to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011.

Information can also be submitted by facsimile to 760-431-9618 or by electronic mail to fw8cfwocomments@fws.gov. If you are submitting comments electronically, please avoid the use of special characters or encryption. Please refer to 'Island night lizard' in the subject line and include your name and contact information in the body of your message.

References cited:

Fellers, G.M., and C.A. Drost. 1991. Ecology of the Island night lizard, *Xantusia riversiana*, on Santa Barbara Island, California. Herpetological Monographs 5:28-78.

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Maisano, J. 2003. "Xantusia riversiana" (On-line), Digital Morphology. Available http://digimorph.org/specimens/Xantusia_riversiana/ (Accessed: April 7, 2005).

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Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. Second edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, Massachusetts. xiv + 336 pp.

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